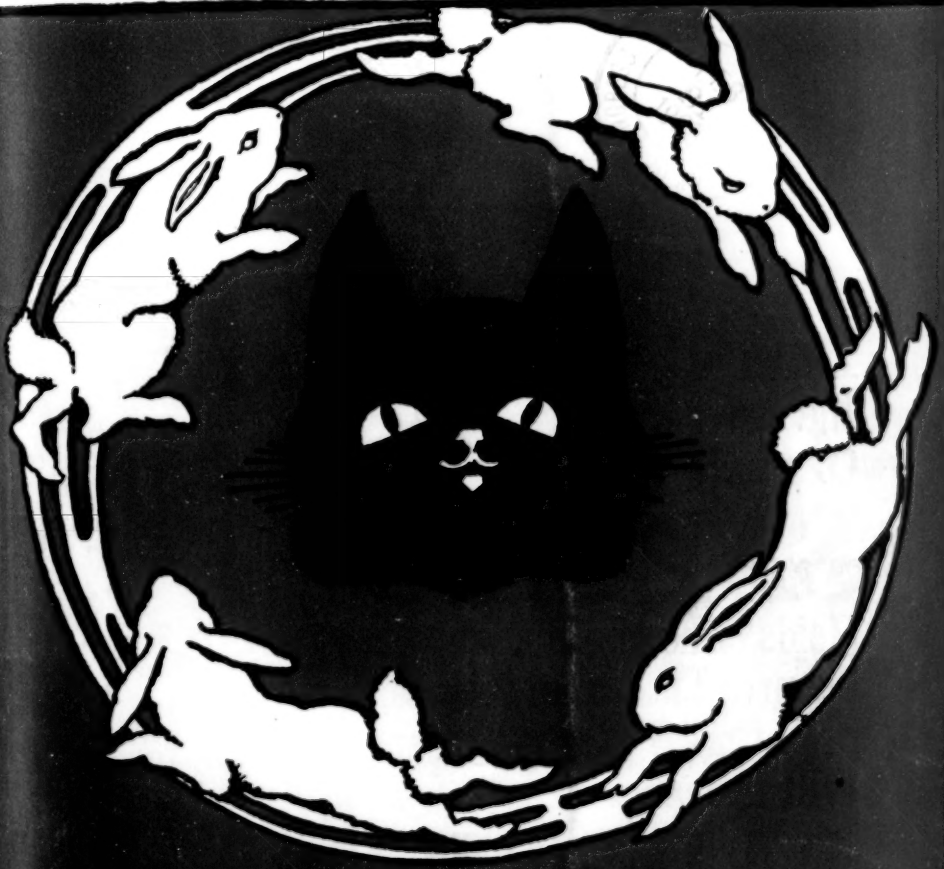
The Black Cat



MARCH 1908

The Last Five Minutes
[illegible]

The Day of Reckoning
[illegible]

An Unsolved Problem
[illegible]

Price 5 Cents

[illegible], XXXI., No. 4. Whole No. 364. Copyright, 1908, by The Shortstory Publishing Company.

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and 10 Norfolk Street, Strand, London, W. C.

Behold
the never ending row
Of maids who use
SAPOLIO
Maids of heart and maids of head
Unmarried maids and maids who wed
Bright maids of every land and clime
Will choose
SAPOLIO
every time
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FEB 21 1908
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CLASS B XXc. No.
16078
COPY B.

The Black Cat

A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

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Vol. XIII., No. 6.
Whole No., 150.

MARCH, 1908.

5 cents a copy.
50 cents a year.

Entered at the Post-Office at Boston, Mass., as second-class matter.

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Something of a Poet.*

BY JACK BROWNING.

"I'M something of a poet myself," Hadley murmured, his eyes following the stream of moonlight through the open window and skyward to its source. "Yes, I am something of a poet—but with a practical bent."

So saying, he turned and followed the luminous stream in its path through the darkness of the room. At the table, polished top aglow in the light, he selected a cigarette, stepped then to the buffet, and poured out a sip of brandy.

Still without a light, he drew a chair to the edge of the streaming moonbeams, and seating himself, smiled into the night, enjoying his moon-fancies. His smoke rings shimmered in the glowing vapor, dissolved lazily, and, like winding ribbons of silver, reeled sinuously into the darkness. The silence was absolute—quieted were even those meaningless, far-away sounds that become audible only by contrast with the stillness of night.

"Not so much as the flutter of a leaf," he thought. "I can almost hear the flowing of this stream of moonlight. Silence seems to have drugged the—"

He strained forward and listened. From some indeterminable

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part of the house came a low tapping, as of breeze-swayed bough on window pane. The sound continued only a moment, however, and Hadley's interest sank to a listless curiosity, and thence to forgetfulness. The moonbeams crept down from the buffet, crept past the table, past Hadley, through the open window, and up, slowly higher and higher, till the upper casement hid the last of them.

A little longer the glow of the cigarette palpitated in the darkness, then flashed, comet-like, through the window; and Hadley, with a satisfied exhalation of the last puff of smoke, rose and stood a moment, refilling his lungs from the sweet night air.

"What a night!" he thought. "I—"

In a near-by chamber a door creaked, and quickly, noiselessly, he darted into the folds of a heavy portière. Peering cautiously from his hiding place, he smiled and exclaimed silently: "By Jove! A burglar!"

For, a thin shaft of light, crossing the doorway leading into the hall, darted left, right, up, down, like a furtive glance, then vanished. The pat, pat of a cat-like tread drew nearer and paused, and Hadley, with excited amusement, could almost feel the finger of light exploring his hiding place. A moment later he saw it on the wall near him, and then it darted through the doorway into the library, followed by the cat-like tread.

Warily the watcher stepped from the curtain, the thick carpet yielding silently to the pressure of his feet. To the library door he advanced and, scarcely breathing, peered into the room, ready to draw back his head if the flitting light should turn toward his direction.

Curiously he followed the shaft of light which, like a long, slender, and incredibly nimble probocis, guided by a dimly and grotesquely outlined monster, was exploring every nook and cranny of the large room.

Books, books, books—row upon row, fell under the light as the walls were examined. And, as the circle of exploration narrowed, the inquisitive probocis drew covers of darkness from chairs, leather and invitingly huge; from a table, long, polished, and massive, holding scattered books and magazines; from a fireplace, covered, but alluringly reminiscent of dancing flames of

winter evenings, surmounted by a mantel, whereon a small marble Venus appeared for a fleeting instant, dazzlingly white, then vanished.

"No lover of art, our burglar!" thought whimsical Hadley, whose eyes sought instinctively to pierce the darkness for a second glimpse of the snow-white goddess. Then he turned his attention again to the diminutive searchlight.

On a desk, which filled a corner with its oaken bulk, the light had settled; from top to bottom, from side to side, fingering drawer after drawer, it moved. Apparently interested, the monster behind the light advanced to the table and placed his keen-eyed assistant on the top, and then followed the low ring of metal on metal.

"Hope he doesn't mar that desk," thought Hadley. "It's altogether too fine a piece of furniture to be battered. But I can't stop the play in the middle of the first act. By Jove!" he added, "He's orthodox!—cap, mask—even to the week's growth of black whiskers!"

For the burglar, bending over the desk, had come full into the light, and surely a better specimen of burglar never cracked a safe for the edification of a breathless gallery.

Three unlocked drawers spared Hadley the pain of seeing the desk marred, but the fourth and last failed to yield. Key after key from the softly tinkling bunch was tried, and then the burglar, with a whispered oath, drew forth a small jimmy, and pulled a curtain from a near-by window over the resisting drawer.

The sound of splitting wood was muffled by the curtain, but, for all that, the marauder hastily extinguished the light and waited several minutes before resuming operations.

The open drawer forced an oath of disappointment that was incautiously loud, and a hoarse whisper grumbled:—"Photos! Photos!—Letters!—Bah!"

"Sorry, old man!"

The despoiler turned with a snarl, his right hand flying toward a side pocket, but he stiffened suddenly into a rigid, crouching statue at sight of a revolver gleaming in the path of the light—a revolver, a hand, and part of an arm—back of which loomed a dim shadow.

"Sorry, old man!" the taunting voice repeated. The revolver, hand and arm were unwavering — maddeningly so.

"What the hell —"

"Hands in front — up!"

The burglar's hands went up.

"Now, lower them just enough to take off your coat — Be careful! There, toss it to me. Now turn around — all the way. Good — no projections about the hips. Sit down on that desk stool. And raise your mask a trifle — raise it, I say! — Horrors! Lower it — quick!" The taunt in Hadley's voice brought the unflattered burglar to his feet, but the revolver motioned him back.

The captor laughed softly, then placed the coat on the table and began to fumble through the pockets, careful all the time, however, to keep at least one eye on the captive. A revolver came from one side pocket, followed by a bunch of keys. Hadley gave these articles hardly a glance, and sought another pocket.

"Ah, here we are!"

First came a necklace and, in spite of himself, Hadley's eyes were drawn to the string of flashing gems, before which the lantern light became pale and lusterless. Again the scowling spectator sprang to his feet, and again the revolver motioned him back.

"My!" Hadley exclaimed. "You are a painstaking burglar to prowl through a desk with a fortune like this in your pocket!" He dropped the fortune into his own pocket, and again prospected the coat.

"A pendant. Tinsel beside the necklace, but a beauty." The pendant followed the fortune.

"A watch. Pretty — Yes, set with diamonds, but a trifle." The trifle joined necklace and pendant.

"Another pendant. Pearls — very pretty. I have a weakness for pearls. And rings, rings, rings! Dear me! What an avaricious scoundrel you must be! If you should get into Tiffany's safe, I suppose you would steal the janitor's coat on the way out."

Finding nothing more of interest in the coat, Hadley moved the bull's-eye to the desk, compelling the burglar to shift his seat into the glare. Carelessly he moved one of the photographs into

the light, but at the first glance his indifference became eagerness, and, with a low exclamation of admiration, he caught up the card.

"What a face! The rarest jewel of all!"

The snarls and muttered oaths of the burglar suddenly ceased, and Hadley glanced up suspiciously in time to motion warningly with the revolver.

"Don't disturb me!" Again he scanned the face in the photograph, intently following with an artist's eye every delicate line of each beautiful feature.

"Beautiful! What wouldn't I give to see—"

Hadley was interrupted by a sudden light that flooded the room with blinding brilliancy. Instinctively he glanced at the burglar. That rough-moulded creature no longer snarled, he was breathless, and the tense muscles of his powerful body showed through his clothing.

"Bob!—Brother dear! Is that you?"

Hadley clutched the photograph and smiled expectantly. "Her voice! A proper voice for such loveliness! I *must* see her face!" The thought ended in a glow of admiration.

In the hall doorway stood the girl, as little like the photograph, Hadley thought, as the round moon is like an electric light. She was clad in a loose dressing robe, as if she had just arisen from bed, sleep was still in her eyes. But, as Hadley looked, terror flashed into her face, and she took a faltering step backward, her lips parted as if to scream.

"Please do not scream!" Hadley admonished her. "There is no danger." He followed her terrified glance toward the burglar, and just in time.

"Stop!" he commanded. "Down!" as if speaking to a dog. "So! Now don't move again—on your life!" Then, once more addressing the girl, and smiling reassuringly: "I am an officer. I noticed this villain prowling about the house, and when he entered, I followed, hoping to take him in the act. I have been quite successful, as you see."

To Hadley the relief that flickered across the girl's face was joy enough.

"Oh!" her exclamation was almost a sob. "I—I thought it

was my brother!" Her voice faltered, and she leaned against the door casing, weeping softly.

"Please do not be alarmed! You can help me, if you will."

"Oh, how?" The girl looked up with a timid courage, and sought to dry her tears.

"If there is a telephone handy," Hadley continued, his voice softly encouraging, "you may call another officer. Central will do it for you. Alone I may have trouble with this scoundrel."

"Oh, there is a telephone at the other end of the hall. Just tell central to have an officer sent to this number? Is that sufficient?"

Hadley smiled and bowed, and the girl, answering in like manner, tripped down the hall on her errand.

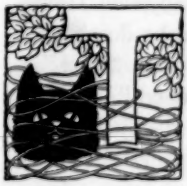
"Now!" Hadley whispered to the burglar. "This way—quick!" And before the astounded knave had time to think, he was hustled into the smoking-room, and through the window, from which Hadley had watched the moon.

"Wot!" He finally found breath to gasp, as together he and Hadley were making their way over the second back fence. "Ain't you a cop?"

"Cop!" Hadley laughed, and involuntarily felt to reassure himself that the photograph was safe in his pocket. "I—" and he laughed again. "I am something of a poet, but—" and coming just then to a promising alley, he slipped away, finishing from the darkness: "but with a practical bent!"

The Hot-Water Bag.*

BY CAMILLA J. KNIGHT.



"HERE comes Fred, now," said Louise Marshall. "And what in the world is he carrying?"

"It looks like — it *is* a hot-water bag," answered Helen. "For pity's sake, what possesses him to be walking through the street with a hot-water bag in broad daylight?"

"Where do you suppose he got it? Hullo, Fred, do you want your bag filled with hot water?"

"Thank you," answered Fred, gravely, "the water is not cold yet."

"Where did you get it?" asked both at once. "At the office?"

"No, at church."

"You didn't," said Louise, incredulously.

"Sure thing I did, though."

"That's a pretty cover on it," remarked Helen, knowing that Fred wanted them to tease him to tell.

"Yes, isn't it? That may help me to discover the owner. 'L. D.' Do we know any one with those initials?"

"There's Lucile Dittman," suggested Helen.

"Then it's probably hers. I'll take it over to her after dinner." And Fred held up the bag for the inspection of his mother, who had just come into the room.

"What do you mean, Fred?" said she, examining the dainty embroidered linen cover. "This Lucile's? How do you know, and where did you get it?"

"Why, I picked it up on the steps of the First Baptist Church, and it has Lucile's initials on it."

"On the church steps? Fred, you're fooling. Come, tell us where you got it."

"I am telling you the solemn truth. I was coming along Ken-

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dall Avenue and I saw it lying half way up the steps of the church."

"But how —— Who would take a hot-water bag to church?"

"Search me. I can only tell the facts as I know them. They've been having a convention at that church, closed today. Probably some of the ministers lost it."

"Maybe some one had it in a baby carriage," suggested Helen.

"This warm day? Besides, what would any one be doing with a baby carriage half way up that long flight of stone steps?"

"Maybe they were taking the baby to be christened."

"At a Baptist Church? Well, hardly. No, I decided on the way home to advertise it, but since you suggest it is Lucile's, I'll just take it over to her."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Louise. "Lucile would never forgive you. Of course it isn't hers. She always goes to Trinity Church. Besides, she doesn't take a hot-water bag with her."

"Some one does, evidently. Well, since you insist on it, I will write an ad."

"What are you going to write?" asked Helen. But Fred was busy scribbling, and made no answer. "How's this?" he asked at last.

"'Found. On Kendall Avenue, Wed. P. M., a hot-water bag, contents still warm, embroidered cover, with initials. Owner can have the same, with privilege of refilling, by proving property and paying for this ad.'"

"Shall you have them call here for it?" asked his mother.

"Oh, no, indeed. I'll give them a letter at the Herald office and correspond with them awhile. This is a valuable find and not to be parted with lightly."

The next morning Fred tucked the bag into his pocket when he went down town. It was no part of his intention to insert so ludicrous an advertisement. Besides, he had thought of a scheme that promised fun, and also gave him a chance to get even with Lucile Dittman, whose April Fool joke on him rankled yet. So his first errand in the city was to find her brother Tom, explain his plan, and get his co-operation. Lucile went away a week later, and when Tom strapped her trunk, he succeeded in drawing

away her attention while he slipped the hot-water bag into the tray, under some waists that lay on top.

That evening, when Lucile arrived at The Idle Inn, she found there an old college friend, Evelyn Meriden, an extremely pretty girl — in fact, the loveliest of her acquaintance. As Evelyn was to leave the next day, she went up to Lucile's room after supper, while Lucile began unpacking.

"Oh!" exclaimed Evelyn. "You have a cover for your hot-water bag exactly like one I made for Lola Dale — same initials, too. Isn't that odd?"

"What?" said Lucile. "I haven't any hot-water bag!"

"Then what's this? It must be yours, for it has your initials on the cover."

"But it isn't," insisted Lucile, bewildered. "I never owned one in my life. How in the world did the thing get into my trunk?"

"Maybe some one has made one for you and put it in for a surprise. Can't you think of any one who might have done it?"

"Why, no. Besides, how could they get it into my trunk, when I put in those waists at the last minute before Tom strapped it?"

"It isn't a new bag, for I can see that it has been used," said Evelyn, examining it closely. "It's funny it should be so exactly like the one I made for Lola, even to — Oh!"

"Even to what?"

"Why, I had to piece the facing for Lola's, and this is pieced just the same and —"

"Perhaps you think I stole that bag and cover," said Lucile, with a touch of indignation, real or feigned, in her voice.

"I don't know what to think," said Evelyn, absent-mindedly, as she continued her close scrutiny of the embroidered initials. "The more I look at it the surer I am that this is the cover I made for Lola —"

"Evelyn Meriden, do you think I stole that thing?"

"Why, no. But it certainly is very strange."

"Strange? It's more than strange. It's uncanny, it's weird, it's ghostlike. I pack my trunk and lock it. I open it, and there is something in it I never saw before, which you say you made and I stole and —"

"Now, Lucile, I did not mean to say that you stole it, or even borrowed it. But how — "

"Yes. 'But how'? I feel as if I were the victim of a deep-dyed plot. I hardly dare to unpack any further for fear of what may be lurking in the cavernous depths of that innocent-looking trunk! There may be dynamite bombs, for aught I know! It is horribly mysterious."

"Some one must have done it to play a trick on you."

"But why Lola Dale's? How could she get it to my house? I hardly know her, and haven't seen her for an age, if she does live in the same city. I wish you'd take the thing and return it to her, if you are so sure it is hers. I don't believe I could recognize a thing I made, five minutes after I finished it."

"I shouldn't be so absolutely sure of this if it were not for that one place."

"Well, take it, anyway. I don't want it. I wouldn't dare use it if I was dying with a pain, for fear it would spirit itself inside of me, as it did inside of my trunk."

"I'll tell you. Lola will be at Hillside, and I might take it with me, and find out if she has lost hers."

"Do," urged Lucile. "I never want to see it again. But don't tell any one else. If this is a stupendous joke on me, no one shall know that I was a victim. Understand?"

"I understand. I won't tell. And now I must go to my room, for Auntie will be wondering what has become of me."

When Evelyn left, the next morning, she carried the hot-water bag, wrapped in a newspaper, on top of everything else in her suit-case, so as to give it to Lola Dale as soon as she saw her.

As her train stopped at the station two miles from Hillside, there was the usual babel of stage-calls, — "This way for the Marston House," "Stage for the Restful Inn right here," and so on. The coach for the Marston was quickly filled, so that a young man bound there was obliged to take a seat in the Restful stage, which, the driver assured him, passed right by the Marston.

He reached his hotel a little later than his party, who had gone in the other stage, so hurried to his room to make himself presentable for supper. He opened his suit-case, tossed aside a newspaper that lay on top, and thrust in his hand to get his toilet-case.

His fingers became entangled in something, and he drew out a filmy, lacy thing, which he held out at arms' length and gazed at in consternation.

"Great Cæsar's Junk Shop!" he ejaculated. "What in thunder——" Then a thought struck him, and he tipped the suit-case up on end, effectively re-arranging its contents. The initials E. M. stared him in the face. "They've given me the wrong thing, confound 'em," he muttered, as he tried to stuff the contents back. Just then a voice at the door called:

"Come, come, aren't you 'most ready? We're waiting for you." He shut the case together before he answered.

"Oh I — I've been hindered. Don't wait for me. I'll be down in a minute." He did not propose to have his sister teasing him about having a young lady's wardrobe thrust on him.

"Can't I help you?" persisted she. "Shall I come in?" and without waiting for permission, in she walked. "Why, for pity's sake, can't you get your suit-case open?"

"'Tisn't mine. That driver gave me the wrong one, and—"

"Oh, did you open it? Whose is it?"

"Open it? Why should I open it? Can't I read those initials?"

"'E. M.'", read the girl, as she tipped it up. "Almost the same as yours. And no doubt she packed it with that lace ruffle and bit of ribbon hanging out!"

"Well, laugh if you want to. I'm going down to supper as I am," and he grasped the inoffensive suit-case with a vindictive air, his sister following, and enlarging on the situation to the rest of the party on the way.

At the office, where he explained the state of things, the clerk assured him it could be easily arranged.

"You see," he said, "the other fellow'll be as anxious to get his bag as you are to get yours. The initials, you see, are almost the same as yours. There's hardly anybody at the Restful, yet."

"I told the driver it was the one with 'F. M.' on it."

"And this is 'E. M.' See?"

After supper, one of the girls, needing a newspaper, said:

"I saw one on the floor in Fred's room. I'll go in and get it." When she picked it up, however, out dropped that same hot-water bag! The expression on Fred Marshall's face was enough to

paralyze a stone post. He looked from his sister to the bag in a helpless kind of way, as she said :

"Fred Marshall, didn't you ever find the owner for that bag? Have you kept it all this time, or — "

"Kept it nothin' ! Do you suppose I've been carrying it around in my vest pocket? I don't believe it's the same one, anyway."

"It is. See the cover. And I remember that place where the color had run a little — must have been wet sometime. Fred, what did you do with it? How did it get here?"

"I don't know. Probably the last person who had this room left it. Great Cæsar ! What have I done that I should be haunted by a hot-water bag?"

"You've done plenty of things, no doubt. But what puzzles me is how the owner could have got here and got away again, and left it, so soon, for of course you returned it to the owner."

"Oh, yes, of course ! I certainly didn't keep it. But why does it follow me like an avenging angel? You don't suppose Tom told Lu — " here Fred stopped, realizing that he might be giving the whole thing away.

"Tom? Lucile? Now, Fred, you've let out that much, you must tell me the rest. Out with it ! I'll not give you any peace till you tell. Did you try to play some trick on Lucile, and get Tom to help you? Come, tell ! I owe Lucile a few myself."

So Fred told the whole story, and they sat surmising and wondering how the bag could have got out of Lucile's trunk and into a hotel room miles away, till their mother appeared, and the bag was hastily hidden.

"No use worrying her with it," remarked Fred, smiling.

He was in bed when a tap on his door aroused him.

"Fred," — it was Lou's voice — "Nell has an awful pain. Let me have that hot-water bag, will you? It won't do any harm to use it."

"That's a nice little dodge," growled Fred. "You're hatching up some mischief."

"No, really. Nell ate too much of that salad for supper; you know she often has these attacks of cramps, and heat is the best thing for them."

"Why doesn't she have a bag of her own, then?"

"She has, but it's in mother's room, and we don't want to disturb her. Come, Fred, let me have it, that's a good boy, and the chambermaid will fill it for me."

So Fred gave her the bag, but took the precaution to remove the cover, lest she should be planning some joke.

The next morning the clerk spoke to him as he was leaving the dining-room.

"Ah, Mr. Marshall, I have a message from the young lady whose suit-case was exchanged for yours last night — by the way — you got yours all right, didn't you? That's good. Such mistakes will happen, sometimes, in the best-managed houses. The message I was speaking of was that when her suit-case was returned, she missed something from it."

Fred drew himself up. "Well, does she accuse me of stealing it? What was it?"

"Oh, no, indeed, Mr. Marshall, nothing of the kind. She said the article was done up in a newspaper, and you might have thrown it aside by mistake."

Like a flash it came to Fred that when he opened the case he had tossed a newspaper on the floor, and that afterwards the hot-water bag had fallen out of it.

"Why, I'll look in my room. Seems to me I do remember seeing a newspaper on the floor," he said.

He stopped at the door of the girls' room.

"Let me have that everlasting hot-water bag," he demanded. "The girl who owned the suit-case has sent for it."

"Oh, *that's* where it came from. Funny how it got out when you did not open her suit-case!"

"Oh, rats!" said Fred, impatiently. "Let me have the thing, will you? I've got to send it back to her."

"All right, here it is. But the initials on the suit-case are not the same as those on the cover."

"Never mind about that. If I can get rid of this peregrinating bag, I'm going to do it. I don't care if the girl stole it."

But Fred came tearing back in a minute. "See here now, Lou. This joke has gone far enough. Let me have that bag right off quick now, or I'll —"

"Why, Fred, I gave it to you. What's the matter with you?"

"Oh, yes, Innocence, you gave it to me, but you knew perfectly well it would trouble me a little to put a cover on a bag that was a size too large. Now fork over the right one in a hurry. I am not in a mood to be trifled with."

"But, Fred, I don't know anything about it. Helen, did you empty the hot-water bag?"

"Why, no. I left it in the bed. The chambermaid must have taken it."

"Oh, yes, lay it on to the poor servant, of course."

"People who play jokes on other people should not make such a fuss when the joke is on them," said Louise, severely. "But honestly, Fred, no one is trying to play a joke on you. The chambermaid must have had more than one bag to empty, and—"

"Some one beside myself ate salad, evidently," said Helen. "I pity him if he had such a pain as I did."

The chambermaid was found, and the fact came out that another hot-water bag had been in use, that she had emptied both, and must have returned them to the wrong rooms, and that the person who owned the other one had just left on the stage.

"Here's a pretty how-do-you-do," said Fred. "What am I going to say to that girl, I'd like to know?"

After the chambermaid had left the room, Louise was the first to regain her composure.

"There's only one thing to be done," she said. "You will have to go to the Restful, see this girl, and explain it all to her."

"That's a nice job," answered Fred, dolefully. "Go to a strange girl, and tell her my sisters stole her hot-water bag. You girls will have to go with me, anyhow, for it is all your fault that we are in this muss."

Finding out the name of the owner of the suit-case, they walked over to the Restful, and inquired for Miss Meriden.

"We have called to explain about the article you missed from your suit-case," began Fred, but he paused, bewildered by the vision of blonde beauty before him, and then stammered: "I am the man whose baggage was unfortunately exchanged for yours."

"Oh, yes," said the beautiful girl, evidently wondering why he had come instead of sending, and why he had to be re-inforced by the presence of two girls.

"My name is Frederick Marshall, and these are my sisters — Miss Marshall and Miss Helen," continued Fred, looking appealingly at them to help him out. But they merely murmured polite greetings, and left him to struggle with his dilemma.

"You see," resumed Fred, rather lamely for a man whose fluency of speech was considered above the average, "I did not see that the package had dropped out of your suit-case till after I had sent the case back. Then I did not connect the two, as the initials were different. Later in the evening, one of my sisters was taken alarmingly ill, and in my intense anxiety for her life," — Fred was fast recovering his customary ease of manner — "I consented to allow the nurse to use the hot-water bag that had so mysteriously and, it would seem providentially, found its way into my room."

"I hope your sister was relieved," said Miss Meriden, pointedly.

"Thank you, yes," answered Fred. "The doctor assures us we have every reason to hope for her complete recovery." Then he paused again at sight of Helen's flaming cheeks, and resumed with his unaccustomed stammer: "But, unfortunately, the bag was left for the chambermaid to empty, and she exchanged it for another, belonging to a person who has left this morning. I insisted on keeping the cover, so I can — I — will — I —"

Miss Meriden was bewilderingly pretty, and her face showed so plainly that she was trying to make up her mind how much of his story to believe, that it upset his composure, and he hesitated. In that instant, a flash of intelligence passed between her and Helen, and her quick wit told her that for some reason his sisters were perfectly willing to let him flounder.

"I should not mind so much," she said, seriously, "but the article in question does not belong to me. A friend of mine lost it, and I — er — I found it, and was returning it to her."

"How strange!" said Fred, with an air of intense interest. "How could any one possibly lose a hot-water bag?"

"I have no idea how *she* did, but you know how it strayed from *my* keeping. The owner will be here today, however, and —"

"That settles it," interrupted Fred. "I will buy a hot-water bag today to fit this cover," drawing it out of his pocket. "I would like to keep it so as to insure a fit."

"Certainly," assented Miss Meriden. "The cover alone would not be of much use."

"I wonder," said Louise, meditatively, "if they keep hot-water bags at the blacksmith's shop. I don't know of anything else around here that bears any resemblance to a store."

"I never thought of that," said Fred. "Isn't there a drug store?"

"No," answered Miss Meriden. "Really, it is too bad for you to replace it when it was no fault of yours. Suppose we let it go for the present. Maybe the missing one will come back, and anyway my friend doesn't know I've found it, and, for that matter I don't know she lost it, only —" and Miss Meriden stopped, now herself confused.

"The plot thickens," said Louise, sententiously. "Miss Meriden, we came to see that our brother told the truth, and he has done fairly well, for him. There were — are — reasons why he deserves to be punished."

"I object," interrupted Fred. "The persons who borrowed and used the article are more to blame than I. However, I shall be magnanimous. I will send for a bag, then return it to you with the cover, unless my sisters manage to embezzle it."

"You'd better be careful," warned Helen, "or we'll tell Miss Meriden the whole story."

"I am sure it would be interesting. By the way, I have friends living in your city, and I am sure I have met you, Miss Marshall. I certainly have heard my friend, Lucile Dittman, speak of you."

"Surely, we know her very well. You visited her a year or two ago, did you not? I thought your face was familiar. Have you seen Lucile lately?"

"Oh, yes, I just left her at Fairview, at the Idle Inn." Then the girls went on chatting, Fred meanwhile thinking: "If she's just seen Lucile — and she's had that hot-water bag — how did she get it?" He listened intently, half expecting to hear her tell of Lucile's finding the bag in her trunk. But Evelyn was faithful to her promise to Lucile. If she suspected anything, she kept her own counsel, and let fall no hint as to the manner in which the bag came into her possession.

In the corridor at the Marston, the chambermaid met them.

"I've been to your room several times, Miss Marshall," she said. "The lady who had that other hot-water bag went off this morning, but it wasn't hers. I have given it to the lady who owns it and here is yours."

"Thank you," said Louise, and Fred promptly took charge of it. He went over with it in the afternoon, preferring to see Miss Meriden alone, and find out, if possible, how much she knew of its journey in Lucile's trunk. His queries must have been rather bungling, though, for she suddenly looked him straight in the eyes, and said:

"Mr. Marshall, you had seen that hot-water bag before it fell out of my suit-case. Tell me about it."

Fred might well have posed for Innocence as he said:

"All hot-water bags look alike to me. I can not imagine why you should accuse me of a previous acquaintance with this one." He stopped suddenly, and plainly showed his chagrin as Louise and Helen entered the parlor. After speaking to Miss Meriden, Louise said:

"Well, Fred, you must be relieved to have at last delivered that long-suffering article, so that it will not haunt you any longer."

"I have just been accusing your brother of a previous acquaintance with it, but he — Why! there's Lola now! I didn't hear the stage," and rushing to the door, Miss Meriden brought in a tall, pale girl who was passing. The Marshalls had met Miss Dale, and in the greetings that followed, the bag was momentarily forgotten, until Lola suddenly spying it, stopped in the middle of a sentence to exclaim:

"Why, that's my hot-water bag! How in the name of wonder did it get here? It's the one you embroidered the cover for, Evelyn, you know."

"Thereby hangs a tale," said Evelyn, "or many tales, I fancy. Let's all confess, now, so that we can get the whole history complete. I'll tell my part."

"I think Fred should begin," said Helen, but —"

"No, let Lola begin," interrupted Evelyn.

"Some one must take the chair," cried Fred, "in this court of inquiry —"

"And you'd like to be chairman, I suppose!"

"Oh, Miss Meriden!"—shrilly put in Helen, and then there followed a torrent of explanations, questions, counter-questions and replies from a quintet of voices, tracing the adventures of the mysterious hot-water bag backward, to where Fred Marshall had first found it—on the steps of the First Baptist Church.

But Lola Dale added a new character to the cast of the comedy—a Mr. Winship, to whom, she said, she had loaned the bag.

"And who, pray, is Mr. Winship?" cried Miss Meriden.

"Oh," replied Lola, "he's the funniest little old gentleman, who lives in the flat next ours. He has servants, but no family, and he's always having a pain somewhere, and getting a hot-water bag. One day last week he came to our door in great distress, to know if he could borrow one, as his had sprung a leak. Of course I let him have mine at once—'to save his life'—but I had no idea he intended to wear it to church!"

"But—Great Scott!"—suddenly ejaculated Fred, when every other knot in the complicated skein was apparently disentangled—"didn't Lucile ever know the confounded thing was in her trunk? Have I lived in vain?"

"I'll wager you've lived to regret practical joking!" commented Louise, severely.

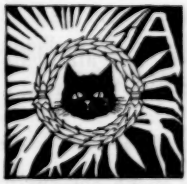
"No-o"— drawled Helen, catching the look that flashed between her brother and the brilliantly beautiful Miss Meriden. "I guess you've lived to some purpose!"

"The subject is changed!" announced that blushing young lady. "The moral is: Always have your name and address—street and number—plainly inscribed on all your belongings!"

But when Miss Meriden herself took her next long journey—it was a honeymoon—it was observed that she still confined herself to the use of initials on her baggage. The initials remained the same, but to the initiated they now signified "Evelyn Marshall."

The Test of an Ideal.*

BY GORDON H. CILLEY.



ND so," said the man, with a bit of finality in his voice, "you admit that you care, you concede that I care; you admit that there is no tangible reason under Heaven why you shouldn't; and yet you simply won't."

She looked up at him for an instant and regarded him narrowly. Then she nodded, and, stooping, caressed a carnation in the cup of her hand. "I did not put it in that way," she said in low tones.

"But isn't that just the situation in a nutshell?"

She seemed to ponder as she released the flower. Then she lifted her head to face him. "Well, what if it is?"

As she took on defiance, the man became gentler. "Margaret, you will admit that I have some claim to know your reason."

She again caressed the flower, but this time nervously, and she was longer in making answer. And when the answer came it was: "John, if I gave you the true reason you would say it was a woman's whimsey; and I won't tell you any reason except the true one."

They stood in the little flower garden in front of the rectory. He was a young physician — she the daughter of the rector — and matchmakers gossiped of them as a famously lovely pair.

The man persisted: "Margaret, I have a right to know."

The girl culled the flower and held its bloom in his face. "It's because I am a woman."

"Well?"

"And I have a woman's reason."

"But is it a reason?"

"Men can't understand women's reasons."

"Pshaw!"

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"It is the truth, John; no man can ever understand. They haven't the feeling."

"Do you deny that I have feeling?"

She looked at him frankly and then spoke without levity: "John, I do believe that you have more feeling than most men. If I tell it to you, will you respect my reason?"

"I will promise that."

"Then you shall know. I have an ideal. No, not an ideal man, different from you. It is an ideal condition. Perhaps I should call it a situation."

"You mean that this is not the place for a proposal?"

"I am serious now, John. I'm talking to you more seriously than I ever did before. I don't believe in the way that people make love and marry nowadays — it is too cheap."

"Too cheap?"

"Yes, too cheap. When I marry I want to marry a man that I not only imagine might be a heroic character, but one that I know is just that. And that's not all; I want him to know that I give myself to him because he is that character, and that he has made and proved himself a hero for my sake."

"You travel lofty paths, Margaret?"

"John, why aren't you a hero?"

"So that's the reason!"

"But you might be — you are the man I would imagine a hero."

"And if you were the ordinary woman you would marry me out of hand?"

"That's just it — women have made themselves too cheap."

"They take their heroes on trust?"

"I'm glad that you understand. Even the best women, women who hold the highest ideals, cheapen themselves and hate themselves for doing it. They meet the men they imagine might be heroes, they glorify them, and feed themselves on that imagination and tinsel glory, and they marry. And then, oh, John, I know so many who have been disappointed. They eat out their hearts in secret disappointment. And it's their own fault."

"And what is the conclusion?" The man spoke very gravely now.

"The conclusion is that women so cheapen themselves that they cheapen the men. They cheapen love and they cheapen life. They set the price low, and the quality falls lower. It makes life simply comfortable and love menial. I don't believe that I am talking simply for my own pride and desire, John — I believe that it is principle."

The man frowned and seemed about to make reply. But he checked his words. The girl went on:

"So there you have my reason, and you may call me a romantic little fool for it. You may call me a girl graduate with silly, old-world ideas to apply to modern conditions; but if you want to know the truth, I can tell you that three women out of five who have any ideas at all that are worth the name believe just the same as I do, but haven't the courage to live up to it. They marry and make the best of it; but I'm not going to do it. I'll be an old maid with my idea and my carnations and my tabby-cats if I have to be, but I'm not going to be a wife that is always wondering whether her husband really might have done great things if she had forced him to do them when she had the chance."

They walked as the girl concluded her declaration, and now they were seated on the steps of the rectory. The man laid off his hat, crossed his legs and swung his foot nervously.

"Margaret, I'm not going to ridicule your argument. I can only hope to dissuade you from your view."

"John, am I right or wrong?"

"There's just the trouble." He laughed mirthlessly. "I confess that I don't know whether you are wrong. Your argument, I mean. But I think that your conclusion goes too far. You will confess that there is happiness in marriage."

"I will admit there is comfort. It is generally tolerable. But think of the greater happiness, and the better world there would be, if men had to strive, as a matter of course, and to prove themselves. It is the mission of women that I am pleading, John. They can't do great things themselves, but they can drive men to greatness, and when they don't do it they fail in their duty. Men, and some women, nowadays, laugh at romance as it is brought down to us in the old literature; but that literature lives; it is taken to heart."

"What do you want me to do, Margaret?"

"John, I never suggested that," but the girl's color heightened to a glow of pride, and she bent slightly toward him.

"Do you want me — will you put me to the test, Margaret?"

"I did not mean that, John; I thought you would simply disagree with me and that that would be all."

"I may disagree, but that will not be all, Margaret. I will take the test. But how shall I know?"

"How shall you know?"

"I mean, how shall I know when my works have been sufficient."

"John, I should ask a great deal. You have done wrong, for you have encouraged me."

"Ask all that you will, only that I shall know when it is enough. I shall not come to claim you until you are satisfied that it is enough."

He rose and stood before her, bareheaded, and with his hands clasped behind him. "I will not come pleading a half-cause. You have set a test. Whether I agree to its justice or not, I should never be happy and you would never be happy, if you did not have in me all that you would ask in a husband. Therefore I accept the test. But in doing so I make a condition. You must let me know when your requirement is fulfilled."

The girl plucked nervously at the petals of the flower. She looked up and over the garden. "John, it may take years; Oh, I am asking so much. Is it too much, John?"

"Let it take years, if need be. But how am I to know? I shan't come to ask you!"

"John, you are not going to stay away?"

"I do not mean that; — I shall come here whenever I can — but I shall not broach this subject again until I know that you are ready to have me do so."

Again the girl looked over the flower garden. The sun was setting, and the carnations turned their faces toward him for the day's good-bye. The glory of the spring-time evening rested upon the lawn, and the robins made merry on the grass. The girl rose and placed her hand upon his arm in a half caress. "Let us walk among the flowers," she said, gently, "and I will show you how

you shall know; and, John, dear, the sign that I shall give you shall be only for you. If you accept my test no one else shall have my test; and you must kiss me to seal the bargain, for you become my knight; and I must be faithful, too."

Along the box-bordered walk they paced slowly, and the white-haired rector who saw them from his study window looked on proudly. It was the child of his old age, and the man he would have chosen for her. He felt no sense of espionage whilst he watched them linger among the flowers, and when he saw a caressing kiss at parting his thought framed itself into the murmured words of the Benediction.

Two days later when his daughter, with wet eyes, told him that their friend had taken service in the medical corps of the army and would proceed at once to the Philippines he was puzzled, but he did not question her. He was old, and had watched life and its emotions in many phases.

Throughout the year she watched the papers closely for Manila news, and more than once gave kisses to a treasured clipping. One powerful magazine article dealing with plague and poverty in the land where he labored she found under his name and glowed with pride because of it. Summer, autumn and winter passed and his monthly letters she treasured, not so much for what they told as for what they refrained from telling. He was keeping the pact and made no pleading.

In the early spring she went forth to plant her carnations, and hesitated long. Before her were the sand pots with the slips that were labelled white and red. The pink ones she had abandoned. The beds prepared by the gardener she opened for them and then threw down her trowel and went to her room to again pore over the clippings, the magazine article and his letters. She went again into the garden, pale but resolute, and planted the red carnations only. Two weeks later she received a letter.

"I am coming home," he wrote, "for my tour of foreign duty is ended. I could have two years more in the home service and then renew my commission, but I do not care for it, and have decided that I will resign after getting home. I know that by the time you receive this you will have planted your carnations. They will bloom by the time I reach you. I cannot help entertaining

hope, Margaret; but, knowing you as I do, I feel that they will hold no message for me. That is why I shall not hold service longer in the army. I must seek another field."

When he came the girl was among the flowers. He looked on silent while she, with crimson face and nervous fingers, plucked at the red carnations. She lifted her hand and touched the scar upon his cheek and the medal upon his uniform blouse. "I did not know of these," she faltered; "you should have told me."

"I would have cheated you had I done so," he said, gravely. "For they tell merely of chance; not of real performance."

"You keep the pact better than I do, John, dear. I hesitated when I planted them; and that was before I knew of these," and she again lightly dwelt with her fingers upon the scar and the star. "And you have two bars upon your shoulder straps. You are a captain, John."

"That was also due to opportunity. It was not the kind of thing you had in mind; only a night-time skirmish where I, a non-combatant, happened to be the only officer near the guard tent. I took out the men and beat off a little party of Moros. It was only because it was out of my line of duty that the medal came."

He remained to the evening meal, and the aged rector watched them both with growing mystification, but still refrained from questions. The girl walked with her lover again adown the box-bordered path when he was leaving, and again lifted her face that he might kiss her in the moonlight, and then she asked him where he would go and what he would do.

"To Alaska," he said. "I think that the best chance is there."

"I did not mean the finding of fortune."

"Nor do I, Margaret. But I must go somewhere, and that is the place that I have chosen."

"Why not stay here? Do you have to go to the ends of the earth to find opportunity?"

"Not always; but for me to stay here would defeat us, Margaret. Companionship would be too much for resolution. Either I would weaken and come begging you to give up this test or —" He stopped.

"Go on," she said, in a low voice. "You mean that either you would weaken or I would do so?"

"Margaret, this test has now come to mean as much to me as to you. I will not argue even with myself whether it is right. But it has become the quest of my life. And so, I warn you, dear girl, if you really do love me, to hold to your resolution."

"John, it may be so long." She spoke wistfully, and her eyes were wet. Now that she had him home she realized how much she had wanted him. He had but to say the word and the test would have been cancelled. But she had built up in the mind of her lover what she realized she might try in vain to shake. But, at least, there was consolation in that she had found what so many of her sex had sought in vain.

The man took her once in his arms and pressed his lips to hers. "Good-bye, Margaret, darling," he said, and was gone.

Again the year waxed and waned, but this time there were no newspaper clippings, no magazine articles, though she sought with almost incessant diligence. Letters came irregularly, and they principally were descriptive of the life and the country. There was nothing of anything that he had done. There was nothing of himself save the barest mention of his movements and of minor results of his work for the Geographical Society. Afterward she learned how he had opened a new trail in the snow-bound mountains for which even the Indians forsook the paths of their fathers, and was to the argonauts a boon inestimable. But he did not write her of this, and press despatches did not tell of it.

When he came again in the spring he barely glanced at the carnations. That they would be red he had never doubted, and when their radiant blooms confronted him he felt neither surprise nor disappointment. When his card was taken in, the girl came to the door and led him to the steps, where they sat and talked. He told of his travels and mild adventure, and she told of her father's failing health and wistfully begged to know of his plans.

"This time to India," he said; "I feel, dear, that I have wasted time and talent. I am a physician, yet I frittered away one year doling pills to malarial soldiers and malingering natives and another outside of my profession altogether. If I do anything it must be in the free pursuit of my own calling. I am going to study the plague."

Her face paled. She tried to speak, but gasped and bent her

head upon her folded arms. The sunlight tangled in her hair and gave it the splendor of gold. He tenderly put his arm about her and whispered in her ear:

"Sweetheart, darling sweetheart, if it is so much, why go on? Surely it is enough for us both to have withstood the test so long. There can never be question of faith or affection now."

The girl lifted her head and looked at him with eyes that blazed through their tears. She spoke with quick sharpness: "John, not another word if you ever want to look me in the face again."

He drew back as a flush mounted beneath the tan of his face. He rose to his feet and the girl sprang up and stood before him. "Oh, John, dear, I spoke too hastily. Forgive me, dear. But it is right that I should have done it. Oh, dear; last year it was you who had to hold me to my resolution; and this time I must hold you to yours. I must do it, John, to have your respect and my own. You know I must, dear heart. Could either of us ever look the other in the face, if we should surrender now?"

The man shook himself and answered dully: "I suppose you are right; yes, you are right. But it is long; it is long!"

"John, you would not love me if I should weaken."

"You will hold it a black mark against me because I was weak?"

"No, I shall not, dear boy. It was only because I cried. If I had yielded then you would have been ashamed of me and of yourself. We would have been ashamed and never happy again."

Again they supped at the rectory board and again the venerable rector wondered, but held his peace.

Long months passed before clippings from Bombay and London papers began to confront her in the home journals. They were of his work among the plague-stricken and his success that made all India marvel. The Viceroy fêted and honored him; the King complimented the American Ambassador upon his countryman. His discoveries were the talk of the court, and there was free discussion to the effect that he might have a baronetcy for changing his allegiance. At this news the girl laughed. His allegiance! He who had won a medal of honor under Old Glory! And what was a baronetcy compared with the knighthood he sought? Ah, it was something to have driven a man to this!

Soon he wrote that he was coming home; not a word about the carnations or the quest, but there was in the letter an exultance that had never been in letter of his before; and as she went to plant her carnations this time she did not hesitate.

Days dragged slowly on through a backward spring. Oh, if they should fail to bloom in time! The buds were never so laggard, and one morning when she ran out to see them she was near fainting because one of the most forward of them seemed tinged with red. Tremblingly she pried it open to make sure that the bloom would be white.

From London he cabled a greeting, but not the name of his ship, and from that day on she worked assiduously to coax the flowers. It was on the seventh morning that she stood in the garden and clasped her hands in sheer happiness, and then stooped and shyly kissed each of three glorious white carnations. "Oh, you darlings, you darlings! You knew that he would come to-day; surely he must come to-day!"

Long she spent before the mirror through the morning. Never before, she excused herself, had woman so full reason to welcome the man who would come to claim her, or so full right to array herself for his joy. It was with pride that she bent her gaze upon the glass and glowed because it showed herself more beautiful than she had ever dared to believe herself before; with the pride of her glorious womanhood that she went herself to the door when the rectory bell jangled raucously; with swelling bosom and a glorious flush that she threw wide the door to welcome —

Ah! Not him, but a letter with a great black seal!

. . . . . .

The casket lay in the dim lit church whilst townsmen trod slowly past to give glance of tribute to him who had brought to his birthplace a meed of praise. Some brought flowers, and some left tears, for he was loved among the poor before he went upon knight-errantry. And last there came, faltering beneath her mourning veil, a woman, to leave the simplest tribute of them all — three carnations, white as snow.

"The Last Five Minutes."*

BY ANNA McCLURE SHOLL.

N the smoking-room of a liner four men were carrying on one of those anecdotal conversations which seem born of the idle life on ship-board. A little distance from the group sat a man who listened intently to all that was being said, but without comment. He had a long, narrow face, restless blue eyes and features which made it difficult to determine whether the dominant qualities of his nature were good or evil.

Someone had just told a story of a certain general's action in the face of imminent death, and in the pause that followed, the fat, jovial man, who is nearly always in a smoking-room group, said with an air of reflection:

"I've often wondered, as I suppose we all have, what I'd do if I were told that the last five minutes of my life had come. I've often wondered how I'd spend them."

"There would scarcely be time to draw up a will," the lawyer remarked.

"I'd write a few lines to the person I love best," said the college senior, frankly. His engagement had just been announced.

"I guess I'd make up any quarrel I had on hand," said the stout man, who did not look as if he could bear malice over night.

The fourth member of the group had remained silent. He was watching the varying expressions which passed over the face of the listening stranger, like a running comment on the conversation.

The collegian recalled his attention.

"Hartley, how would you employ 'the last five minutes?'"

Richard Hartley paused a moment before answering. All eyes were turned towards him expectantly, as if anything he said would carry weight with his audience. He, himself, was chiefly conscious

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of the stranger in the corner, who appeared to be growing uneasy under the continued discussion of the subject.

"How would I employ them? I think I'd confess my sins, and ask Heaven to have mercy on my soul."

He spoke with an honest fervency, which closed the subject, as if the last word had been said. After a moment's silence someone introduced a new topic.

Later in the day, Hartley was approached by the stranger of the smoking-room, who had been conspicuous during the voyage for his reserved and somewhat ungracious manners. After an exchange of commonplaces, under which Hartley veiled his surprise at these advances and the stranger the real object of them, the latter said:

"I was not a little interested in your answer to the question under discussion this morning. If you will pardon a personal remark, it did not accord with your appearance."

Hartley laughed.

"Do I look like such a hardened sinner?"

"No, that's just the point. You look triumphantly happy and easy in your mind, as if your conscience were as clear as crystal. I was attracted to you first by that very quality in your manner."

"I am certainly of a cheerful nature," Hartley assented, somewhat embarrassed by this analysis of himself on the part of a perfect stranger: "And I've no great crimes on my conscience," he added, laughing.

His companion turned his head sharply away and gazed out to sea. After a moment's silence Hartley said:

"May I ask whom I have the honor of addressing?"

They exchanged cards. The stranger's bore the name "Henry Penn Gilman." No address was on it.

This somewhat singular interview was the beginning of a shipboard acquaintance which was actively pursued by the older man, and passively accepted by Hartley, who was not able to rid himself of a certain repugnance and distrust which the shifty eyes and hard mouth of Gilman inspired in him. Yet he felt a kind of pity for the man who seemed shut away by himself in a bleak loneliness.

The voyage continued uneventful until the fifth day out. Then

heavy seas were encountered, and a storm of wind which was finally hushed and blanketed in a dense, clinging fog.

On the evening of the sixth day, while dinner was being served, and while the usual jeremiads called forth by the weather were dampening the spirits of the less hopeful passengers, there came a crash like the collapse of a house, accompanied by a hideous, tearing, splitting sound, as if some giant were making fire-wood of the ship. An awful silence followed the roar, and then a pandemonium of shouts and cries as the passengers, unheeding the commands of the captain and the officers, made a mad rush for the door and the upper deck. Hartley, who had sprung to his feet with the others, got out of the way of the dangerous onward sweep of the panic-stricken throng and, when the dining-room was emptied, proceeded leisurely to the deck, endeavoring by the control of his muscles to keep his mind cool.

In a glance his eye took in the situation. The ship, in collision with an iceberg and partly impaled on its jagged sides, was safe only for the few moments before the torn and twisted timbers should be loosened from the ice-fangs by the tumbling of the waves.

The captain, who had taken his place on the bridge, had ordered the life-boats lowered. Surrounding them now was a struggling, screaming, throng.

Suddenly a pistol shot sounded clear and sharp above the hideous uproar.

"I'll shoot the first man who attempts to get into a boat before the women and children," the captain roared through his megaphone. "If you must die, die like men."

His command had the effect of calming a certain portion of the passengers, and of restoring a semblance of order. Hartley, after assisting some women to find places for themselves and their children, withdrew from the throng and made his way towards the impaled bow, which every moment was loosening more and more from the berg, with strange and dreadful noises of breaking timber and rushing, pounding water, just visible as a gray swirl, through the still deeper grayness of the fog.

Knowing that the boat carried a large steerage for an outward-bound voyage, and remembering the preponderance of women on board, Hartley realized that the captain's "if" was a cold, stark

fact. He was face to face at last with the most common yet the strangest of all destinies.

For a moment panic swept over him. He had an impulse to fight his way to one of those overcrowded boats now about to swing into the horrible gulf. Then his manhood re-asserted itself. He could at least die like a man. He bowed his head in silent prayer.

At that moment Henry Gilman approached him, his face white and drawn.

"There's no hope," he said hoarsely. "I've just seen the steerage. It's like hell."

Hartley made no answer.

"The ship will be off the berg in another five minutes," he went on. "We're up against the last scene."

Hartley was silent.

"I've something on my mind," the man said, with a hurried, feverish emphasis. "I've got to tell someone before I die. There's no priest on board. May I tell you?"

Hartley nodded, but there was a strange indifference in his manner. He had the air of a man already passing beyond the affairs and interests of earth.

"This is what I must tell before I go to my account: Six years ago I was the business partner of a man named John Benedict, in the town of Tetronville, Ohio. By silent, untraceable processes, I swindled him out of his entire fortune, a hundred thousand dollars. He died a ruined man a year later, worn out with his troubles, for which I was wholly responsible. I am, in the sight of heaven, a thief and a murderer. If I live, I will make restitution to his daughter. If I die, the Lord have mercy on my soul!"

"*I* can't be your judge," Hartley said, humbly.

"You *have* judged me, because you are an honest man. . . . Great God! Is the ship going down?"

Sounds all the more terrible because of their strangeness now made further speech impossible. The two men, drawing their life-preservers more tightly about them, looked around for some detached object to which they might cling. One thought was in the minds of both, to get clear of the horrible maelstrom which the going-down of the vessel would create. Rushing to the side of the

ship they joined there a throng of ghastly-looking men, now silent in the face of the last agony. A wailing child, who had missed its mother, caught at Hartley's hand. He lifted it to his shoulder, looking down with a shudder at the seething water. Who could live in such a sea !

At that moment there was a cry from the bridge. The captain, who had been standing motionless as an image, was now leaning over the rail, straining his eyes into the fog which, as if in a mirage of paradise, suddenly lifted in the neighborhood of the ship, revealing the close proximity of another huge liner.

. . . . . .

Two years later Richard Hartley landed in his native country for the first time since that outward-bound voyage which seemed more like a fantastic dream than a real occurrence.

When Henry Gilman had reached the deck of the rescuing steamer he had gone below immediately, nor did he emerge from his cabin until the vessel was docked in the English port. In the bustle of landing he had avoided Hartley who, divining that the man's confession was now a source of embarrassment to him, made no effort to speak to him again.

During his two years abroad he had often wondered whether the confession had been an outburst of hysteria, the creation of a brain temporarily disordered by fright, or whether the man had really rid his conscience of an intolerable load. Hartley resolved that on his return home he would go to Tetronville, and investigate the truth of the story.

The little Ohio town seemed too small to harbor secrets. He called on the clergyman who had been longest in residence there, and from him learned that, seven years before, John Benedict, once a wealthy man, had died in poverty, leaving a daughter, Margaret, twelve years old, who still lived in the town. By dint of skilful questioning, Hartley, without revealing what he himself knew, managed to extract the information that Benedict's misfortunes were never attributed to anything but his own ill-luck or possible mismanagement. He also learned that Margaret Benedict and the aunt with whom she lived were in very humble circumstances, though they were numbered among "the best people" of Tetronville. Evidently, Gilman had not kept his vow.

Hartley, making business his pretext, stayed on in the place, and at last met the young girl, who had become a romantic figure to him. She was of a delicate and spiritual type of beauty, with an air of seriousness about her which indicated a maturity of thought and feeling beyond her years. Hartley asked himself whether it would be advisable to reveal to her a piece of knowledge which might only serve to trouble and unsettle her — knowledge of which no advantage could be taken, since it had been obtained, as it were, under the seal of the confessional.

His acquaintance with her progressed rapidly under the double attraction of her charm and of the unconscious part she had played in the drama of the shipwreck. He wondered how much or how little she knew of the cause of her father's troubles.

His interest in her, as the daughter of the man whom Gilman had wronged, gave place, after a time, to a deeper, more personal feeling. The friend became the lover.

After his engagement with her was announced, he told her of the events which had first led him to seek her out. She listened with profound astonishment. When he had finished she said:

"But the name of my father's partner was Charles Henderson."

"Did you ever see him?"

"I remember him perfectly."

"Describe him to me."

"He had a long, narrow face, blue eyes, set close together, and a rather nervous manner. He had the trick of giving a little cough in the middle of a sentence."

"It's the same man," Hartley said. "Did your father ever speak in your presence of distrusting Henderson?"

"Not directly. Once, shortly before his death, he said to me that he was not to blame for leaving me in poverty — that he had placed his confidence where it had been abused."

"There is no doubt, then, of the truth of this confession, but Gilman's or Henderson's vow of restitution will probably never be kept. It is but another instance of the old adage: 'The devil was sick, the devil a monk would be.'"

After his marriage, Richard Hartley took his wife to New York. Although the incident of the shipwreck was now very little in his thoughts, he would find himself at times scanning the

hurrying throng on Broadway for the face of the man whom he had last seen under such dramatic circumstances.

After the lapse of five years events occurred which made the minds of both husband and wife turn towards Henry Gilman. Through the collapse of a corporation, Hartley, a comparatively rich man, lost his entire fortune.

Margaret, who had known poverty during the impressionable years of her girlhood, faced cheerfully the necessity of beginning life anew, but her husband was for a time cast down and embittered. His thoughts began to dwell on Gilman and Gilman's debt to his wife. He lived over again in imagination the scene of the shipwreck. He heard the strange threatening noises, he saw the helpless passengers running about like rats in a cage — and against this background of terror he saw a face white with the terror of conscience.

He longed to employ means to track Gilman, but Margaret's influence prevented him. She seemed content to wait for whatever tardy judgment of her cause time held in store. Hartley acknowledged at last that she was right, and giving up the thought of this possible short cut to fortune he devoted his energies to making a new path for himself. They moved to a Southern town, where he obtained a business position of minor importance.

After a year whose hardships brought to the surface again the memory of Gilman, Hartley went on a commercial trip to a city some ninety miles distant, taking Margaret with him for a change of scene and air.

Walking on a side street near the courthouse, a day or two after their arrival, they saw just ahead of them a man, the outlines of whose figure seemed to Hartley vaguely familiar. He was searching his memory for some enlightening recollection, when the man, overtaking another, detained him in conversation. As he did so, his own full face was revealed.

Hartley grasped his wife's arm : "It's Gilman !"

They stopped short in their walk. The color left Margaret's face.

"Yes — it's my father's partner," she said.

Gilman — for it was he — shook hands with the man he had accosted, and said:

"Gray, you're just the man I want — I was on my way to your office. My daughter is to be married this afternoon."

"Did he have a daughter?" Hartley whispered.

"Yes — but she lived with her mother. You remember I told you he was separated from his wife."

"Yes — hush!"

From his pocket he drew a card and hastily wrote:

"The last five minutes."

Just as Gilman was about to follow his companion into a doorway lined with lawyers' signs, Hartley laid a detaining hand upon his shoulder and silently held the card before his eyes. Gilman looked at it, turned it over and read the owner's name; then a ghastly grayness overspread his face.

"You are Charles Henderson," Hartley said in a low tone. "This is my wife. She is the daughter of the man you wronged; it was to her that you promised restitution, should you be saved from imminent death. That vow has evidently escaped your mind!"

Gilman made an imploring gesture, and looked furtively over his shoulder at the lawyer who was slowly ascending the stairs.

"For God's sake!" he whispered hoarsely, "Don't disgrace me now! My daughter is about to be married to a man of one of the oldest families here. He would —"

Hartley interrupted him:

"Better he should know, than marry the daughter of a —" He broke off, and added after a moment's reflection: "Will you keep your solemn vow — late as it is? Will you make restitution?"

Lines of acute suffering deepened in Gilman's face.

"For Heaven's sake," he cried, "Have mercy! When I landed in England I meant to do everything I had vowed to do, but I was met by the news that my wife, from whom I was separated, had died in Paris, where my little daughter, whom I had not seen for six years, was awaiting me. I found a lovely, lonely child of twelve, and my ambition at once awoke again, for her sake. Though I often thought of my vow, though my conscience reproached me, I could not bring myself to give up what I now regarded as *her* fortune. Now she is to marry the man she loves."

Margaret's eyes softened, and she appeared about to speak, but Hartley, restraining her, continued, in an unrelenting tone:

"What of another child, just the age that your daughter was when deprived of a father, whom you had robbed of wealth, and perhaps of life! What of *her* bereavement, of *her* poverty? What of your vow?"

Gilman bowed his head. "It is the justice of Heaven," he said wearily. "I was just now going up these stairs to dictate a deed insuring my daughter her dowry. But now—"

"Wait!" exclaimed Hartley. "How large has the fortune grown from the hundred thousand which you—took?"

"I have now about three hundred and sixty thousand dollars, which I meant to give my daughter."

"Um-m! Eighty thousand for interest," Hartley mused.

"What is that!" exclaimed Gilman.

"Dictate to your lawyer two deeds of gift—each for one hundred and eighty thousand dollars—one in favor of your daughter, the other in the name of my wife! . . . What I said was that we will accept the odd eighty thousand in lieu of interest!"

Gilman hesitated, then with an odd look of mingled renunciation and relief, he said:

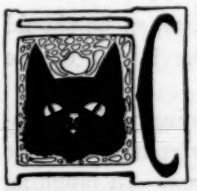
"Come up, and you shall see me sign them."

So that afternoon, when Miss Gilman became Mrs. Winthrop, her "dot" was only half as large as it might have been, but the young couple were none the wiser.

But when Margaret Hartley, going up to the bride, put her arms about her and kissed her, and the father who had given her in marriage turned upon Mrs. Hartley a look which a soul might wear on entering paradise—a look of gratitude so exalted that it stamped his features with a nobility never before seen there—Richard Hartley was well content.

The Day of Reckoning.*

BY AGNES L. PRATT.



CLINTON STEELE had a secret, gnawing with unrelenting persistence at his inner self.

"Murderer!" he would groan guiltily, in the silence of his soul, and then shudder lest the thought make itself audible to his business friends and associates.

It had happened when he was a boy, and so swiftly had a sharp line been drawn between the brightness of childhood and a darkened future that even now, at times, it seemed that what he knew to be a fact must have been but a frightful nightmare. By day the story disturbed the routine of his business life, and at night he re-enacted its scenes in his feverish dreams.

He saw himself again a boy of eight, hot-headed, reckless and impulsive, a self-constituted leader of his little playmates. He beheld the blue sky, and breathed the sweetness of the flowering fields. The longing for adventure — for wild, heroic action — had been strong upon him that fateful day.

Near his cottage home he played at battle, and rehearsed the scenes he had read of the day before. There was the open field, with the sun upon it — there the little group of boys — and here the "dead line," drawn with the heel of his own stout shoe, which they, the prisoners of war, were not to cross.

Again the childish faces rose before him, but he was not a boy, playing with his comrades in a field of flowers, but the stern guardian of the hostages of his army, and the line he had furrowed in the moist soil marked the confines of life and death.

In unsuspecting sport the boys had advanced to the very edge.

"Halt!" he had commanded sternly, and they had not read the deadly determination glowing in the excited eyes. They thought the ferocity cleverly assumed, and applauded by their taunts. To

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him it was the hideous realism of a mind dominated for a moment by another personality.

A few steps farther the restless feet advanced, touching almost the narrow groove in the fallow ground.

It was but the work of a moment, in obedience to an impulse, for the boy to turn, dash into the pretty cottage and out again, brandishing a shining revolver.

Sometimes, in the solemn silence of the night, when he should have slept, Clinton Steele would moan with the horror of the scene that followed.

Waving the weapon at arm's length, its glistening nickel flashing in the sunlight, the furious boy had harshly commanded the little group to return to their imaginary prison-pen. In laughing disorder, entering into the spirit of the scene as they understood it, they rushed upon what they thought an empty pistol, and pushed nearer and nearer to the "dead line." Then a tense young voice rang out:

"Halt! The first man who comes to the edge of this line I will shoot — as I would a dog!"

They were the words of the book he had read the day before, but they held a deeper meaning to him now. One boy, more daring than the rest, laughed aloud:

"Who's afraid? Come on, boys! See me escape from prison!"

Another step and the eager feet had crossed the line. Another step and a blinding flash followed by a deafening report, staggered the little group that had dashed after a new leader.

And on the ground at their feet, a ghastly paleness creeping over the boyish features, lay their little comrade, shot like a dog — as he had been threatened!

To Clinton Steele the hours that followed were blurred and indistinct. Memory had woven a merciful veil. But the awakening was awful. From the heights of an exalted heroism of the imagination to the cold realism that whispered cruelly, "You knew it was loaded — you knew it would kill!" the descent had followed swiftly. Yes, there lay his guilt.

To his boyish sense of justice his sentence to confinement in a reformatory until he should reach his majority — though at eight that meant endless ages — was less than he merited. Faithfully

and uncomplainingly had he served, but from the moment the doors had shut upon him the boy who fired the fatal shot had ceased to live. It was his retribution. Somewhere in his omnivorous reading he had learned that death was the just penalty for wilful murder, and when the dead face of his companion accused him in the darkness, he had whispered, though shuddering:

"Yes, I know, Clinton, they ought to hang me, but they wouldn't — said I was too young — that I didn't understand. But I did — I did. And say — " with that impulsive generosity that had always been, so many said, his saving grace — "I'll tell you what I'll do! I'll let you live my life, if you want to. I ought to died, for killing you. An' — an' — " hesitatingly, as the munificence of the gift to his departed friend became more real to him — "if you want to, you can live instead of me. I'll do always just as I think you'd want me to. An' I'll make you a good life, too!" he finished, confidently, as he dedicated himself to the sacrifice.

The bargain made in the darkness of midnight was faithfully kept. His own identity was sunk in that of his friend. The slayer of his comrade from that hour had no existence. To the boyish mind he was annihilated, as he ought to be, for the enormity of his crime. Henceforth, he was Clinton Steele. He began a new life of gentleness and conscientious behavior that surprised the officials of the school where he passed the slow-moving years of his minority.

When he went forth on his twenty-first birthday, it was under the name of the boy he had slain, and only one message went back to the old home where only a brother and sister remained, who could scarcely remember him:

"Forget me. I shall never return. From this day, under a new, and to me a holy name, I am to make a new life — for him whom I robbed of his."

And, hundreds of miles away, with the success that is born of determination, Clinton Steele rapidly rose in the ranks of his chosen occupation. He studied and worked, early and late, and in time became one of the firm by whom he had been employed.

And then a little joy found vent in the words he murmured in the darkness: "See, old fellow, see what I have already done with

the life I robbed you of ! And I will do more yet ! You shall be prosperous and respected — as you deserve to be."

It seemed to him that close to his ear his comrade's voice whispered questioningly, "And happy ?"

His heart throbbed painfully — he ceased to exult. "I can't promise that — that's the hardest of all ! But — imploringly — you will understand ?"

After that came the crowning success of his business life. As the trusted representative of vast interests he went abroad, and everywhere his unfailing good nature and resources procured him recognition.

In Italy, on the little holiday he allowed himself, he met HER. She was with relatives, travelling from place to place. He got his first glimpse of her, — and an introduction — in the Pitti Palace. In Rome, among the ruins of the Coliseum, the spell deepened, and the blue waters of the bay of Naples mirrored their sparkling clearness in Her eyes. In Paris, where they met again, quite by accident, Her personality seemed more familiar as he was privileged to stroll by her side for two or three mornings on a shopping tour, and there he learned, word by word, pang for pang, the old, old lesson. It was when they had taken passage on the same ocean liner, plowing its westward way, that the full truth revealed itself.

On moonlight nights they strolled the deck, talking in low tones of the past, present and future. Of Her past, his present, and their future. Of *his* past they never spoke — because he had none. Sometimes she wondered that this was so, and with her gentlest manner tried to draw from him the story of his boyhood. "There is nothing to tell," he would assure her, calmly, and then, drawing away slightly into the shadow, give the lie to the voiceless agony of his face with the easy banter of his tone.

For the overwhelming possibilities of this happiness he had not reckoned upon when he had given up his life. What could a boy of eight know of this ? "No — no, I cannot do that !" were the words his moving lips would form. "I have given you all — all my life, its achievements, its successes — but you cannot have that. I want that myself. If I am dead, she is not for me. Don't you understand ? I love her — and she is mine !"

Something of the old fire that burned in the eyes of the boy who had expiated his crime with his life glowed in his, and the look of patient gentleness yielded for a moment to one of dauntless daring. But still the voice he had hushed in death commanded: "Tell her all! You have no right to this happiness; your life is no longer your own. Tell her the truth, and let her turn from you!"

The shores of his native land in sight, the hour of inevitable separation had come. He had decided to compromise, but, for the moment, put caution out of sight.

"I thank you for your permission to call," he said. "I shall surely avail myself of it, when wearisome details of business have been attended to." He dropped her hand suddenly.

"I shall be glad," she murmured, "to see you at any time."

He thanked her gravely, and then, in answer to the look in her beautiful eyes, went on recklessly, daringly, forgetting that the man who spoke was dead: "There is something I want to say to you — later. I will come!"

All that night, in his bachelor apartments, he wrestled and argued with the Shade to whom he had yielded up his right to the life of other men. When the gray dawn of morning came, the terms of his compromise were completed

"I will not go to see her — I will give her up. To tell her all the truth would kill her!"

For days and weeks he went about his duties, kindly and calm in his appearance, but the heart covered with the garments of respectability was tortured by the pangs of retribution. Once he caught a glimpse of her face in her carriage, but the studied indifference of her nod of recognition hurt him worse than death. She cared for him, then! She was piqued at his neglect!

Without her, life had become void of ambition or purpose. That night he sent his card up to her with a little pencilled message:

"Please do not deny me — I want to explain."

Measured by the intensity of his emotions, a thousand years might have passed until she came. Gowned in palest green, she seemed the embodiment of all the happiness he had known on that blissful homeward journey. There was no resentment in her manner as she greeted him, and the hopelessness of his doom was

all the more apparent as he read the affection in her lovely eyes.

His day of reckoning had arrived. The punishment — the real punishment — of his crime — was at hand in the complete renunciation of all earthly happiness he was about to make.

When the soft, white hand he held a moment dropped again upon the filmy gown, he began his recital. There were no extenuating circumstances. He did not try to shield the little criminal whose impetuous act had shut the man from Paradise, but fearlessly, unsparingly, he told her all.

Her face grew grave and troubled — tears shrouded the misty eyes she raised to his, as she murmured:

"I am so sorry. How you must have suffered!"

"I did," he said, simply and bravely, for he had conquered himself, "but it was nothing to what I have suffered for this later crime of loving you! I had no right — I should have fled — but I was too cowardly. Therein lay my sin — my crime — and therein I proved that the little lad had not really paid the full penalty, but he shall now, and you will help me punish him. You will loathe me as I deserve, now that you know me as I am!"

In silence he waited for his doom — for the words he knew she would say. But when they came, he could hardly believe his ears.

"But," she said, "you have forgotten *me!* While your stern sense of justice would mete out to the boy who made the man suffer the punishment he deserves, you forget that, at the same time, you are punishing me!"

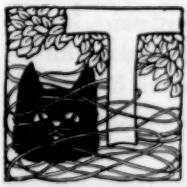
With a new hope, a new life, lighting up his eyes, he sprang from his seat and faced her, as she continued:

"I do not despise you nor loathe you — your life has been expiation enough for the sin of your ignorant childhood. I cannot despise you, for —" her eyelids fell — "I love you! And perhaps even *he* would want you to be free to love me."

There was a moment's hush, and then he read in the pure gaze that returned to his face the fulness and sufficiency of his atonement and his pardon.

An Unsolved Problem.*

BY BELLE MANIATES.



HE Governor was indulging in the unwonted luxury of solitude in his private sanctum of the executive office. The long line of politicians, office seekers, committees and reporters had passed, and he was supposed to have departed also, but after his exit he had made a detour and again sought his office with peremptory commands to his secretary to admit no one.

Then he sat down to face the knottiest problem that had as yet confronted him in connection with his official duties. An important act of the legislature awaited his signature or veto; various pressing matters urgently called for immediate action, but they were as mere trifles compared to the issue pending upon an article he had read in a bi-weekly country newspaper to the effect that a petition was being circulated to present to Governor Dunn, praying the pardon of Jesse Hume.

Then had begun the great conflict in the mind of David Dunn, "the Governor who could do no wrong." It was not a conflict of right and wrong that was being waged. Jesse Hume had been one "to the prison born." A series of crimes, punishment for which had been evaded or shifted on to accomplices, had culminated in one daring act in which he had been caught red-handed, and he had been given the full penalty — ten years — a sentence in which a long-suffering community rejoiced.

Jesse Hume had no friends, but he had made himself useful to a certain gang of ward heelers and petty politicians who were the instigators of this petition, which they knew better than to present themselves; it was to be conveyed to the Governor, so the article intimated, by the aged father, Elias Hume, sole relative of the prisoner.

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Here was where the petty, petitioning politicians showed their cunning and their knowledge of David Dunn, whose boyhood and early manhood had been lived near Hesstown, the home of the Humes. His sense of gratitude was as strong as his sense of accurate justice, and to Elias Hume, David Dunn owed his first start in life. When he was a young country lawyer, Elias had been the controlling power in the politics of his district, and it was he who had accomplished the nomination of David Dunn for state representative. From thence the young lawyer had forged straight ahead with no backward steps — state senator, Secretary of State, United States Congressman, until now as a ruler of a great state he had won the implicit confidence and respect of the people.

There were other ties — other reasons, though these signers knew it not, why David Dunn should heed the prayer for the release of the criminal. Back in the old days of country schools and meadow lanes, there had been a little sweetheart, Alice Hume. When David made his maiden speech, with its bombastic flights in boy-orator style, it was to Alice he turned in his triumph. That night they made their shadowy plans for the future.

Again David seemed to "feel the pressure of her slender little hand," and there came a vivid recollection of the blankness of his life when she died. Her youthful guilelessness and inherent goodness had recognized no evil in her wayward brother.

He, David Dunn, had taken an oath to do his duty. His duty was plain. He owed it to the people, in the name of justice, to show no mercy to Jesse Hume.

On the other hand, would it not be base ingratitude to the man who had placed him on the first round of the ladder to refuse the only favor he had asked — to deny him this one solace in his barren old age? In his moving memory, the almost forgotten voice of his child-sweetheart seemed to plead with him.

It was a wage of head and heart, and both were strong.

There had been no moral compromises in Dunn's code. There was a right and a wrong — plain roads with no middle path, but now, in his extremity, he sought some way of evading the direct issue. If the fellow could be let out on some technicality — an irregularity in the trial! The idea was instantly rejected. He

had been interested, of course, in the case at the time, and had gone over the evidence with Jesse's attorney, who allowed that his client had had a "square deal." If the appeal would only be brought in the regular way to the pardon board first. They would not consider it for a moment, for there was not the shred of a reason for a pardon, but it would not be that way. Old Elias Hume would come direct to him and ask for his son's release. He would ask it quietly and would take it for granted that the youth he had befriended and to whom he had once promised to give his daughter, would be eager to grant the request.

And if he did! Every one would be against it, for public sentiment had been loud in voicing its bitterness towards the crime and the criminal, but it was not public sentiment from which David Dunn shrank — it was from the knowledge that he would betray a trust that he had solemnly sworn to hold sacred.

If he said nay to this old man, who had such faith in him, he would never know a happy moment, and the violet eyes of a fair-haired girl, wistful and reproachful, would ever haunt his vision.

With throbbing brain and rasped nerves, he made his evening call upon Elaine, the girl to whom he was engaged, and who was ever a clearing house for his tired and tried thoughts. She looked at him tonight with her eyes full of the adoration a young girl gives to a man much older than herself.

There was that in Elaine far beyond grace and beauty — the power of charm. David let her talk for a few moments in her bright, vivacious way before he said abruptly:

"Elaine, I am troubled tonight."

"As if I didn't know it as soon as I came into the room, nay, before, for I have read the evening papers."

"What!" he exclaimed in despair. "It's true then! I have not seen the papers tonight."

She brought him the two evening papers, of opposite politics. In glowing headlines of the one against him he read in exaggerated form, but true in the main, the story of his early life, his humble home, his days of struggle, his start in life and all his successes due to the father of the hardened criminal. Would the governor do his duty and see that law and order were maintained, or would he sacrifice the people to his own personal obligations? Dunn

smiled grimly as he thought that either course would be censured by this same paper.

He took up the other one, the organ of his party, which stated the facts very much as the other paper had done, and added that Elias Hume was en route to the capital city for the purpose of asking a pardon for his son. The editor, in another column, briefly and firmly expressed his faith in the belief that David Dunn would be staunch in his views of what was right and for the public welfare.

There was one consolation; neither paper had profaned by public mention the love of his boyhood days.

"What shall I do? What should I do?" he asked desperately.

"I know what you will do!" replied Elaine, quickly.

"What?"

"You will do as you always do — what you believe to be right. But tell me, David, more of these people and of your early life."

From the background of his recollections he brought forward vividly a picture of his early days and struggles.

"What kind of a man is this Elias Hume?" she asked when he paused in his recital.

"He is quite a character — uneducated and unsophisticated in some ways, but keen, shrewd, and full of hard sense — a man of strict integrity, and so sharp at a bargain that he was sometimes called hard, but his heart was softened to his motherless children."

"He must have had a soft spot in his heart for you, to take such an interest in you," she suggested.

"Yes," he said slowly, "he approved of my ambitious inclinations and liked me well enough, but what he did for me, he did because I was engaged to his daughter, Alice. She died when we were both young."

There was a silence. Elaine looked steadily into the flickering light of the open fire. It did not hurt her in the least that he had had a love of long ago. It made him but the more interesting to her, and appealed to her as a pretty and fitting romance in his ambitious life.

"That," she said, gazing up at him in a sympathetic way, "complicates the matter. It would not be easy to do that which would seem to slight her memory."

His face lighted at her comprehension, and he went home, comforted by the thought that there was one who understood.

The next day at the breakfast table, on his way to the Capitol, and in his office, in the curious faces of all he encountered, he read the question he was continually asking himself.

He went into his private office and summoned his secretary.

"Gilkes, don't let in any more people today than is absolutely necessary. I will see no reporters. You can tell them no petition or request for the pardon of Jesse Hume has reached this office, oh — Gilkes, — "

The secretary turned expectantly.

"If Elias Hume comes, of course he is to be admitted at once."

Later in the morning, the messenger to the governor stood at the office window, idly looking out.

"Dollars to doughnuts," he exclaimed suddenly and confidently "that this is Elias Hume coming up the front walk!"

The secretary hastened to the window. A grizzled old man, in butternut-colored, tightly-buttoned overcoat, and carrying a telescope bag, was ascending the steps.

"I don't know why you think so," said the secretary resentfully to the boy. "Elias Hume isn't the only farmer in the world. Sometimes," he added, pursuing a train of thought beyond the boy's knowledge, "it seems as if no one but farmers came into this Capitol!"

A few moments later one of the guards ushered into the business office the old man, overcoat and telescope. The secretary now caught the infection of the boy's belief.

"What can I do for you?" he asked courteously.

"I want to see the guvner," replied the old man in a curt tone.

"Your name?" asked the secretary.

"Elias Hume," was the response.

The old man had not read the newspapers for a week, and he could not know the importance attached to his name in the ears of those assembled. The click of the typewriter ceased, the executive clerk looked up quickly from his papers, the messenger assumed a triumphal pose, and the janitor peered curiously in from the outer room.

"Come this way, Mr. Hume," said the secretary deferentially,

as he passed to the end of the room and knocked at a closed door.

David Dunn knew when he heard the knock whom he would open the door to, and he was glad the strain of suspense was ended. But when he looked into the familiar face, a host of old memories crowded in upon his recollection, and for an instant he forgot why the old man came.

"Uncle Elias!" he said, extending a cordial hand to the visitor, while his stern, strong face softened under his slow, sweet smile. Then he turned to his secretary.

"Admit no one else, Major."

The Governor took the telescope bag from his guest and set it on the table, wondering if it contained the "documents in evidence."

"Take off your coat, Uncle Elias; they keep it pretty warm in here!"

"I cal'late they do — in more ways than one," chuckled the old man, removing his coat. "I hed to start purty early this morning, when it was cool-like. So, Dave, you ain't fergot how you an' all the boys called me 'Uncle Elias.' Wal, times has changed! To think of old Josh Dunn's boy bein' guvner! Why, I never jest seemed to take it in till I cum up them steps!"

The governor laughed.

"Sometimes I don't seem to take it in myself."

He was unlocking a little cabinet as he spoke, and he now produced a bottle and a couple of glasses.

"Wal, I dew declar!" exclaimed the old man, "ef you don't hev things as handy as a pocket in a shirt! Good stuff, Dave! More warmin' than my old coat, I reckon, but say, why don't you ask me what I hev got in that air telescope?"

David winced. In olden times the old man never came right to the point. He had always steered straight away from his object, and no coaxing could bring him to it until he so willed.

"Why — what is it, Uncle Elias?"

"Open it!" directed the old man with suppressed excitement.

With the feeling that he was opening his coffin, David unstrapped the telescope and lifted the cover. A little exclamation of pleasure escaped him. The telescope bag held big red apples, and it held nothing more. David quickly bit into one.

"I know from just which particular tree these come," he said, "from that humped, old one in the corner of the orchard near the house."

"Yes," said the old man, "that's jest the one — the one under which you an' her used to set and purtend you were gittin' your lessons."

The Governor's eyes were luminous in reminiscence.

"I haven't forgotten — her — or the old days," he said, slowly.

"I know'd you hedn't, Dave!"

Again David's heart sank at the confidence in the tone which betokened the faith reposed, but he would give the old man a good time anyway before he took his Destiny by the throat.

"Wouldn't you like to go through the Capitol?" he asked.

"I be goin'. The feller thet brung me up here, sed he'd show me through."

"I'll show you through," said Dave decisively, and together they went through the places of interest in the building, David, as proud as a newly domesticated man, showing off his house. At last they reached the rotunda of the entrance hall where, in a huge glass case, reposed the old, unfurled battle flags. The old man stopped before the case and looked long and reverently within.

"What was your regiment, Uncle Elias?"

"Forty-seventh Infantry."

David called to a guard and obtained a key to the case. Opening it, he bade the old man take out the flag of his regiment. With trembling hands Elias took out the flag he had followed when all his country went to war. He gazed at it in silence and returned it carefully to its place. As they walked away, he brushed his dimmed eyes with his coat sleeve.

David consulted his watch.

"It's luncheon time, Uncle Elias. We'll go over to my hotel. The executive mansion is undergoing repairs."

"I want more'n a lunch, Dave! I h'aint et nuthin' sence four o'clock this morning."

"Oh, I'll see that you get enough to eat," laughed David.

In the hotel lobby a reporter came quickly up to them.

"How are you, Governor?" he asked, with his eyes fastened on Elias.

David returned the salutation and presented his companion.

"Mr. Hume from Hesstown?" asked the man with an insinuating emphasis on the name of the town.

"Yes," replied the old man in surprise. "I don't seem to reckleck seein' you before."

"I never met you, but I've heard of you. May I ask what your business in the city is, Mr. Hume?"

The old man gave him a keen glance from beneath his shaggy brows.

"I cum to see the guvner," he said shortly.

And then David, with a laugh of delight at the discomfiture of the reporter, led the way to the dining-room.

"You're as foxy as ever, Uncle Elias! You checkmated that newspaper man in good shape."

"Was that a newspaper man? Wal, I suppose it's his trade to ask questions."

The old man's loquacity always ceased at meal times, so his silence through the luncheon was not surprising to David.

"Wal, David, ef this is yer lunch, I'd hate to see what you call dinner. I never et so much at one settin' afore!"

"We'll go over to the club now and have a smoke," laughed David, "and then you must go back to my office with me, and see what I have to undergo every afternoon for two hours."

At the club they met several of David's friends — not politicians — who met Elias with courtesy and composure. When they returned to the Capitol, Elias was ensconced comfortably in an armchair in the private office, while David listened with patience and replied with intelligence to the long line of importuners. The last interview was not especially interesting, and Elias' attention was diverted. His eyes fell on a newspaper. He picked it up carelessly. He saw his own name in big type. It was the issue of the night before. He read the article through and returned the paper to its place on the under part of the table without being observed by David, whose back was turned to him.

"Wal, Dave," he said when the last of the line had left the room, "I used ter think I'd ruther do enythin' then be a skule teacher, but I swan ef you don't hev it wuss yet!"

David made no response. The excitement of his boyish pleas-

ure in showing Uncle Elias about had died away as he listened to the troubles and wants of his callers, and now the recollection of the old man's errand again confronted him.

Elias looked at him keenly.

"Dave," he said slowly, "t'aint no snap you hev got! I never know'd till today jest what it meant to you. I'm proud of you, Dave! I wish — I wish you hed ben my son!"

The governor crossed the room impetuously.

"Uncle Elias," he said earnestly, "I would have been if — she had lived."

"I know it, Dave, but wishes can't bring her back, and you hed orter find another, now."

The governor's face lighted.

"I have, Uncle Elias, and I want you to meet her. She knows about you and Alice."

"Wal, wal, I wanter know!" said Uncle Elias. "I'd like to see her sartain. And, Dave," with a little, sheepish grin, "I've ben and dun it myself!"

"What, Uncle Elias? Not married?"

"Thet's jest what I be! Last week — to a smart, spry, good-lookin' widder, and she's made the old place quite chipper."

"I am glad — very glad," said the governor joyfully. He had hated to think of the old man in his solitude.

"Yes, Dave, thet's what I cum fer — to tell you. I h'aint much on the rite, an' I've allers wanted ter see you here in this great place. They all sez to me, 'mebby Dave's stuck on hisself and his job, an' you'll hev to giv yer keerd to a nigger to be tuk in tew him,' but I sez, 'no! not Dave Dunn! He ain't that kind!' an' I kin go back and tell them how you showed me all over the place and tuk me to the hotel an' ter thet air stylish place whar I wuz treated like a king, an' best of all thet I seen yer girl!"

David grasped his hand.

"Uncle Elias!" he began, but his voice failed him.

"Say, see here, Dave, I didn't know nuthin' about thet," pointing to the newspaper, "until a few minits ago. I sed to hum thet I wuz a cumin', an' ef them disrepptible friends of Jesse's air a gittin' up some fool paper, I don't know it. Ef they do send one in, Dave Dunn, don't yer sign it! Why, I wouldn't hev thet